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# **PROFESSIONALISATION AND APPRENTICESHIP IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

## **SUMMARY FINAL REPORT**

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## **I. OBJECTIVES**

Putting environmental policies into practice - and particularly those generated by the European Union whose directives have to be incorporated by the Member States - involves organisational and institutional change which in turn creates new demands upon professionals at all levels of government. This research examined the local government level where the diversity of administrative structures, traditions and legislative bases provides a theme for comparative analysis. The term "professionalisation" designates these processes of change when they result in a redefinition in the competence of professionals. Such professionalisation can result not only in changes within and between professions and in existing administrative functions but also in the emergence of new professions and new routes and programmes of professional qualification. Specific questions concern the different definitions of the competence of management, the relations between different specialised professional competencies, as well as taking account of the management of uncertainty.

Prevention is an important aspect of the management of the environment at the local level: this frequently implies both initiatives by local government and its professionals in terms of local environmental policies and also an engagement with the general public, be it citizens or consumers, or indeed with more specific categories such as for example the business community. Consequently a basic hypothesis is that mediation constitutes an important dimension in the management of the environment. The extent to which this might involve a redefinition of competencies, of administrative functions and indeed of organisational frameworks is an interesting question.

From this perspective the aims of the research were:

- to analyse the processes of change which environmental policies induce in management at the local level, in relations between the different levels of power within the politico-administrative system, and in relations with groups and categories within the general public concerned with the management of the environment at local level;
- to analyse the development of new competencies or the redefinition of existing competencies and giving special attention to the relationship between technical competencies and "social" competencies of mediation or negotiation; and beyond this to consider what forms of professional education and training might correspond to these changes;
- to analyse specifically how local environmental agents define or redefine their roles in relation to government, to the general public and to scientific expertise.

## **II METHODOLOGY**

First step: examination of the application of European directives

Bearing in mind the diversity of the administrative structures and traditions of each of the countries involved in the study (UK, France, Belgium, Portugal and Germany), it was important to establish a common framework of observation. The first stage of the research therefore consisted of:

- a summary description of governmental structures relating to the management of the environment in the different Member States and in the regions concerned with particular reference to local government;
- an analysis of the way in which a number of European directives already incorporated within national law are interpreted and applied;

Second step: case studies

These were :

- in Portugal. Bearing in mind the relatively weak structures of governmental environmental administration and of the minimal degree of governmental decentralisation, the research focused principally on two aspects. On the one hand the development, stemming from relatively recent

opportunity for professional training and qualification as an "environmental engineer" equivalent to other engineers qualified to the same level. On the other hand an analysis of the activities of environmental engineers who (in the absence of any regional political structures) constitute the only significant level of administrative power other than the centralised state itself.

-in the UK. In a context where power is perceived to be shifting from local authorities towards privatisation or a further degree of centralisation, several institutions concerned with a "local" environmental management were studied: a national park, a waste disposal public company, water environment management, and strategic planning within local government; furthermore the structures and modalities of training in the management of waste were also examined.

- in France. The context is again different with a relatively weak central administration, a process of regionalisation which tends to invest the regions with the power to take initiatives, and where the local environment is managed by various extensions of central government services. The case studies concerned: the analysis of the constitution and functioning of the regional Directorates for the environment and the analysis of an intercommunal developmental initiative incorporating environmental objectives.

-in Belgium. The federalisation of the state has conferred upon the regions most environmental responsibilities; in the case of the Walloon region, this has given rise to a radical administrative reorganisation and a redefinition of tasks across administrative departments as well as between local and central (i.e. : regional) government. This redistribution lead to three main changes: the changes observed in an established and specialised administration (the management of forests), the constitution of a new service to police the environment, and finally the setting up of a new procedure for river management (*contrat de rivière*) which brings together local government, regional services and relevant professional or associative groupings.

- in Germany. The research was limited to the Sarre where an initiative to promote relevant learning by local government professionals working within the environmental sector was analysed.

All these case studies, with the exception of the "*contrat de rivière*", were undertaken using the same methodology of non-directive interviews with professionals in different hierarchical positions. This qualitative method is the best adapted to identify processes of change, blocking factors and the strategies of agents, either individual or collective.

Third step: comparison and synthesis of case studies

The final report included a synthesis of the principal case studies as well as attempts of comparison based on research questions.

### **III. MAIN RESULTS**

#### **1. Organisational and institutional changes**

The diversity of national politico-administrative organisations, of levels of development and of environmental consciousness provided an obvious explanation of the different ways of taking account of the environment. Nevertheless some common conclusions were perceived. The first is that most environmental legislation is applied via pre-existing organisations in accordance with equally well established procedures by existing groups of staff each with its own different framework of reference: environmental policies are first of all reinterpreted before being innovatory. One of the principal conclusions however is that changes linked to environmental policy are inseparable from other changes (internationalisation, regionalisation, privatisation) at work within the politico-administrative structures. The environment becomes the object of innovation within this system to the extent that new actors emerge and engage with it. Nevertheless most environmental problems have their own organisational dynamic which is apparent in a primary tension between a centralising tendency (seeking to treat problems in global manner, integrating sectors and identifying ever greater operational space) and a decentralising tendency (seeking to bring private actors and local government into partnership).

## **2. Administrative reorganisation: tension between specialists**

Without entering into the very complex detail of the different forms of administrative reorganisation which environmental concerns can involve, the research nevertheless identified a second basic tension between groupings of specialists.

Classic administrative logic, frequently in evidence in domains subject to environmental management, has led to the formation of powerful professional bodies well lodged within the structures of the state. Particularly in France and in Belgium the environment is a matter of rivalry between these "*corps*". Nevertheless across the different forms of rivalry and through the different compromises which are therein fashioned one notes that the environmental field remains ill-defined and involves many relations characterised by compromise and power games. Very often environmental management requires recourse to several different expertises with solutions referring to several different types of justifications, technical as well as social. Managing the environment is becoming, it seems, progressively recognised, albeit often only implicitly, as the practice of arbitration between competing principles of legitimacy.

## **3. Redressing balances**

This tension between specialists is not the only one identified; a second fundamental tension concerns more specifically the dynamic of professionalisation. It is manifest in the opposition between the classical vision of a profession where practice is based on the autonomy and independence of each sector of competence and a new vision which values more the interdependence of various professional actors as well as a relation of active communication with non professional actors, particularly various publics or those immediately affected by administrative control.

In particular, technical specialisation and the constitution of new fields of competence and of expertise rendered necessary by the requirement for more intricate environmental management seem to call for a compensating increase in communication both between professional sectors and with the general public. In the Portuguese case, where the capacity for action at the level of local government is not strong, where also administrative expertise is relatively weak when faced with the requirements of European policies, it is the emergence of new specialists defining themselves in terms of their pluridisciplinarity and their mobility, constituting in fact a new professional network, which seems the principal vector of transformation in the politico-administrative field. On the other hand, in those countries with well established centralised government services better supported by technical experts, it is the redefinition of inter-sectorial relations and procedures which appears to be the more important process. In this case, negotiation and democratic management appear as key notions which merit incorporation within programmes of professional education and training.

It is particularly noteworthy that the stimulus to supersede the classical view of the professions derives from a valuing of local relations, of attachment to place, as well as the building of networks of local relations between local government agents from different sectors and of different hierarchical levels. Such networks can generate local environmental policies.

## **4. Government services in action**

From this perspective, the actions of government services tend towards redefinitions which relate to their underpinning legitimacies. As is shown in the more monographic Belgian studies, while the practice of arbitration is not totally new, it does tend to take on new forms resulting from new types of action from within government services. In particular, the environmental police - which already existed before in terms of separate bodies responsible for pollution and for forests - did exercise limited arbitration between local and national interests, between industrial and neighbourhood or workers' interests. As the environment grew in importance, so did such arbitrations become wider in scope. On the one hand, they were no longer a matter only for government services but became more and more public, requiring more careful justifications; and on the other hand, the competing interests claiming a place within the arbitration process, deriving from legislation, from pressure groups, from the media or other actors, have become more numerous and larger with the result that justification is required to be even more complete and detailed. And the necessity for prevention enlarges yet further the scope for justification. New procedures - as for instance the "*contrats de rivière*" - illustrate well the attempt to

define new and more open administrative practices which , if they do not succeed in integrating different types of legitimacy, at least arbitrate between them.

## **5. The notion of competence**

The notion of competence in the management of the environment is a central problem. The classical definition of a profession brings together two distinct definitions of competence: juridical competence (the legally defined field of action) and technical competence (skill based on recognised knowledge). These definitions of competence are adequate to divide reality into autonomous objects each based on its own rationality, implying a growing scientific and technical specialisation, claiming in this way to reduce natural and technical uncertainties.

The analysis of the practices and explanations of professionals working in government services brings out a basic tension and a paradox in demands for education and training. On the one hand it is clear that the management of the environment supposes a growth in specialised scientific and technical competencies, which undoubtedly situates those with these competencies in positions of authority and leadership. On the other hand, it is equally clear that in their actual activities, communication and relationships (between different sectors, with authorities, with the general public) are very important, especially perhaps when it concerns strategic functions. Demands however for education and training tend paradoxically to remain confined to scientific and technical domains, even if a legal competence is today recognised as indispensable to management. This tendency is even more apparent when the organisation of education and training moves from the public to the private sector. An analysis of competence in terms of uncertainty offers an understanding of this tension. Environmental management most often deals with complex objects not easily or simply delimited, and involves not only multiple competencies but also multiple uncertainties, some deriving from nature but others being more social or economic concerns. For instance, waste management cannot in practice disentangle uncertainties related to technical or natural processes from uncertainties related to the economic system or the conduct of consumers; in effect the effectiveness of any technical system depends as much on social conduct as it does on technical arrangements.

This research project has raised a certain number of challenges relating to the professionalisation of the environment, challenges which also impact upon systems of education and training. A redefinition of competence is required which recognises that social competencies, while in no way being a substitute for applied scientific knowledge, have their place in providing frameworks for coping with uncertainty; this especially implies that education and training take account of uncertainty as a social factor central to transactions and exchanges between professionals and between professionals and other public and private actors.

## **IV. SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AND POLICY RELEVANCE**

### **1. Scientific interest and novelty**

Knowing that as yet there is little sociological work done on the question of the professionalisation of the environment, this research was in part exploratory. The application of environmental policies has often been addressed, but principally from a political or a legal point of view. The research has shown that in spite of the great variations of political and administrative structures in the different countries, there nevertheless exists a series of common problems and tensions touching upon the definition of modes of organisation, of professions and of competencies within the environmental domain.

In deriving support in part from the sociology of organisations, we consider as crucial the phenomena of uncertainty. In doing this, we can establish a certain number of links between the sociology of the professions and the sociology of organisations on the one hand, and on the other with the sociology of science and which puts into perspective both scientific and technical knowledge and the arbitrary division between categories of knowledge and modes of knowing. And finally, this perspective has allowed us to designate a certain number of research fields for future attention of which especially: the importance of local place in the political dynamics of the environment, the integration of scientific knowledge in non-linear patterns of decision-making, the individual dynamics of commitment of professionals and the necessity of a reflection on democracy as a means of dealing with different principles of legitimacy in the management of the environment.

## 2. Policy relevance

The environmental domain is a context in which a new conception of professional competence is emerging. We are witnessing a move from the classical idea of a profession based upon autonomy and independence towards a new configuration based on:

- the interdependence of various professional actors;
- an active relationship of reciprocal communication with the public.

A major consequence of this evolution is that environmental professionals can no longer take decisions by themselves within their own sectors, but they must now consult and negotiate with other professionals and with a wide variety of public individual and collective actors.

Environmental professionals must be capable both of entering into complex negotiations with their peers in domains where scientific and technical uncertainties are recognised to be very great and also of maintaining democratic negotiations with a widening range of citizen or consumer interests with very variable degrees of knowledge of scientific and technical data. Such considerations bring onto the agenda the inter-related dimensions of interdisciplinary and interprofessional negotiation and negotiation as a democratic actor.

But how one might "teach" negotiation and democracy remains very difficult to conceive; the research project perceived this as constituting a major challenge to those working in institutions claiming to provide professional education and training. The main recommendation in this matter is a shift of institutional and pedagogic perspective from traditional teaching towards an apprenticeship (in negotiation and democracy).

But the difficulties in delivering a structured apprenticeship in democratic citizenship, which of necessity must include negotiation, are formidable. The lack of interest and attention in society at large to democracy is not helpful, but in addition to this is the apprehension that democracy does not belong primarily to an individual, or to a series of individuals, but, as with language, to the collectivity of people who together have invented it. One possible way of addressing these difficulties might lie in recognising the appearance of two categories of democratic actor: the individual citizen and the collective citizen. This both suggests the possibility of contextualising the apprenticeship in citizenship within the social rhythms of a collective citizen and also sharpens the challenge to institutions of education and training as to how this might effectively be achieved.

In summary the research found that democracy is promoted not because of any *a priori* ethical superiority but because, given that in environmental matters society is as untrainable as the weather is uncontrollable, it offers an operational framework of reference for interactive social learning and decision-making where any argument is recurrently weighted in favour of the (inefficient) necessity of valuing persons as subjects and weighted against the (utopian) ideal of the social manipulation of objects. This weighting factor is never either/or but always a call to redress the balance. At a more general level, there is an alignment here with the thinking of Habermas where not only is there a difference perceived between instrumental reasoning and interactive communication for its own sake, but also in the requirement to attempt to understand others' understandings there is a further call to develop critical reasoning.